

News

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Average Weekly Wages in Washington: First Quarter 2005
Snohomish County records fastest wage growth in the State;
King County has highest wages

In the first quarter of 2005, average weekly wages in Snohomish County increased by 3.7 percent over the year, the largest advance among Washington's nine counties with 75,000 or more jobs. King County was second with wage growth of 2.9 percent, followed by Thurston County at 2.7 percent and Yakima County at 2.6 percent. King County had the highest average weekly wage level in Washington at \$948. (See table 1.) Regional Commissioner Richard J. Holden noted that among Washington's nine large counties, six reported wage growth above the national rate of 2.2 percent, while only King County had wages above the national level of \$775.

Wage Levels

Among Washington's nine large counties, King County's leading average weekly wage was followed by the \$761 earned in Snohomish County in the first quarter of 2005. King and Snohomish counties' wages ranked 38th and 113th highest in the nation, respectively, among the nation's 322 largest counties, and were the only two counties ranked in the top half in the State. Pierce County had the third highest wage level (\$683), followed closely by Thurston County (\$676) and Clark County (\$675).

At the other end of the wage spectrum, Yakima and Whatcom Counties reported the lowest average weekly wage levels in the State at \$516 and \$578, respectively. The average weekly wages in these two Washington counties ranked 318th and 295th, respectively, in the bottom one-tenth among the largest counties nationwide.

At the state level, the average weekly wage in Washington was \$766, very close to the nationwide average of \$775. Even so, the wage level in Washington ranked 14th highest among the 50 states and the District of Columbia. (See table 2.) Eight of the 13 areas in which the average weekly wage levels surpassed the U.S. average fell in a contiguous band along the east coast stretching from Massachusetts to Virginia. The five highest wage levels in the nation were in the District of Columbia (\$1,277), New York (\$1,096), Connecticut (\$1,084), Massachusetts (\$964), and New Jersey (\$963). Average weekly wages in this group were 24 percent or more above that for the nation. At the other end

of the scale, five states had wage levels averaging less than 75 percent of national earnings: Montana (\$533), South Dakota (\$544), Mississippi (\$545), North Dakota (\$550), and Idaho (\$561).

Average weekly wages were higher than the national average in 101 of the largest 322 U.S. counties. New York County, N.Y., held the top position among the highest-paid large counties with an average weekly wage of \$2,025. Fairfield County, Conn., was second with an average weekly wage of \$1,613, followed by Suffolk, Mass. (\$1,390), Santa Clara, Calif. (\$1,372), and San Francisco, Calif. (\$1,368). Four of the ten counties with the highest wages in the U.S. were located in the greater New York metropolitan area (New York, N.Y., Fairfield, Conn., Somerset, N.J., and Hudson, N.J.), three others were located in or around the San Francisco area (Santa Clara, San Francisco, and San Mateo, all in California), while two more were located in or around the Washington D.C. metropolitan area (Arlington, Va. and Washington, D.C.). Rounding out the top ten was Suffolk County, Mass., part of the Boston metropolitan area.

The lowest average weekly wage was reported in Cameron County, Texas (\$460), followed by the counties of Hidalgo, Texas (\$463), Horry, S.C. (\$479), Webb, Texas (\$490), and Yakima, Wash. (\$516). The average weekly wage in the lowest-paid county, Cameron, was less than one-quarter the wage in the highest-paid county, New York.

Over-the-Year Changes

Six of Washington's nine large counties recorded wage growth above the national increase of 2.2 percent in the first quarter of 2005. (See table 1.) Snohomish County's 3.7-percent wage gain was the largest increase in the State, ranking 41st in the nation, followed by King County's 2.9-percent increase, which ranked 86th. Thurston County and Yakima County also ranked in the top one-third among the nation's large counties, with wage growth of 2.7 and 2.6 percent, respectively. Other Washington counties that experienced wage growth that exceeded the national average were Pierce County (2.4 percent) and Whatcom County (2.3 percent).

Among the large counties in Washington, only two reported wage growth that lagged the nationwide average, and none reported an over-the-year decline in wages. Wage growth was below that for the nation in Clark and Spokane Counties, which recorded increases of 2.1 and 1.5 percent, respectively, corresponding to national rankings of 141st and 182nd, respectively. Statewide, the average weekly wage in Washington increased 2.4 percent and ranked 20th in the nation.

Among the largest counties, Collier, Fla., led the nation in growth in average weekly wages, with an increase of 10.7 percent over the year. Cumberland, Pa., was second with 9.3-percent growth, followed by the counties of Hudson, N.J., (9.0 percent), Henrico, Va. (8.4 percent), and Fairfield, Conn., and Rock Island, Ill. (7.7 percent each).

Thirty-five counties experienced over-the-year declines in average weekly wages. Clayton County, Ga., had the largest decrease (-6.0 percent), followed by the counties of Marin, Calif. (-5.6 percent), Hamilton, Ind. (-4.3 percent), McLean, Ill. (-2.8 percent), and St. Louis, Minn. (-2.7 percent).

Average weekly wage data by county are compiled under the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) program, also known as the ES-202 program. The data are derived from reports submitted by employers subject to state and federal unemployment insurance (UI) laws. The 8.5 million employer reports cover 129.8 million full- and part-time workers. The average weekly wage is computed by dividing the total quarterly payroll of employees covered by UI programs by the average

monthly number of these employees. This number then is divided by 13, the number of weeks in a quarter. It is to be noted, therefore, that over-the-year wage changes for geographic areas may reflect shifts in the composition of employment by industry, occupation, and such other factors as hours of work. Thus, wages may vary among counties, metropolitan areas, or States for reasons other than changes in the average wage level. Data for all states, Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), counties, and the nation are available on the BLS Web site at <http://www.bls.gov/cew/>; however, data in QCEW press releases have been adjusted (see Note below) and will not match the data contained on the Bureau's Web site.

Additional statistics and other information

An annual bulletin, *Employment and Wages*, features comprehensive information by detailed industry on establishments, employment, and wages for the nation and all states. The 2004 edition of this bulletin contains selected data produced by Business Employment Dynamics (BED) on job gains and losses, as well as selected data from the fourth quarter 2004 version of this news release. *Employment and Wages Annual Averages, 2004* will be available for sale in late 2005 from the United States Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250, telephone 866-512-1800, outside Washington, D.C. Within Washington, D.C., the telephone number is 202-512-1800. The fax number is 202-512-2104. Also, the 2004 bulletin will be available in a portable document format (PDF) on the BLS Web site at <http://www.bls.gov/cew/cewbultn04.htm>.

QCEW-based news releases issued by other regional offices have been placed at one convenient Web site location, <http://www.bls.gov/cew/cewregional.htm>.

Information in this release will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: 202-691- 5200; TDD message referral phone number: 1-800-877-8339.

For personal assistance or further information on the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Program, as well as other Bureau programs, contact the Western Information Office at 415-975-4350 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. PT.

NOTE

QCEW data are the sums of individual establishment records reflecting the number of establishments that exist in a county or industry at a point in time. For this reason, county and industry data are not designed to be used as a time series. The preliminary QCEW data presented in this release may differ from data released by the individual states as well as from the data presented on the BLS Web site. The potential differences result from several causes. Differences between BLS and State published data may be due to the continuing receipt, review and editing of UI data over time. On the other hand, differences between data in this release and the data found on the BLS Web site are the result of adjustments made to improve over-the-year comparisons. Specifically, these adjustments account for administrative (noneconomic) changes such as a correction to a previously reported location or industry classification. Adjusting for these administrative changes allows users to more accurately assess changes of an economic nature (such as a firm moving from one county to another or changing its primary economic activity) over a 12-month period. Currently, adjusted data are available only from BLS press releases.

Table 1. Covered¹ employment and wages in the nine largest counties in Washington, first quarter 2005²

County	Employment		Average Weekly Wage ³			
	March 2005 (thousands)	Percent change, March 2004-05 ⁴	Average Weekly Wage	National ranking by level ⁵	Percent change, first quarter 2004-05 ⁴	National ranking by percent change ⁵
United States ⁶	129,802.3	1.7	\$775	-	2.2	-
Washington.....	2,702.3	2.6	766	14	2.4	20
King, WA.....	1,093.0	1.7	948	38	2.9	86
Snohomish, WA.....	216.6	4.0	761	113	3.7	41
Pierce, WA.....	253.7	3.3	683	186	2.4	120
Thurston, WA.....	92.6	2.7	676	195	2.7	96
Clark, WA.....	123.1	4.5	675	198	2.1	141
Kitsap, WA.....	80.8	2.3	659	214	(⁷)	-
Spokane, WA.....	194.1	2.5	609	269	1.5	182
Whatcom, WA.....	77.2	5.3	578	295	2.3	126
Yakima, WA.....	90.3	2.7	516	318	2.6	105

¹ Includes workers covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) programs.

² Data are preliminary.

³ Average weekly wages were calculated using unrounded data.

⁴ County percent changes were computed from quarterly employment and pay data adjusted for noneconomic county reclassifications.

⁵ Ranking does not include the county of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

⁶ Totals for the United States do not include data for Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.

⁷ Data do not meet BLS or State agency disclosure standards.

Table 2. Covered¹ employment and wages by state, first quarter 2005²

Area	Employment		Average weekly wage ³			
	March 2005 (thousands)	Percent change, March 2004-05	Average weekly wage	National ranking by level	Percent change, first quarter 2004-05	National ranking by percent change
United States ⁴	129,802.3	1.7	\$775	--	2.2	--
Alabama.....	1,871.5	2.0	642	32	2.6	16
Alaska.....	290.3	2.0	744	18	1.5	37
Arizona.....	2,459.7	5.0	698	23	2.3	22
Arkansas.....	1,144.8	1.7	579	46	2.8	11
California.....	15,064.5	1.9	872	7	2.0	26
Colorado.....	2,158.6	2.4	787	11	2.2	24
Connecticut.....	1,624.7	0.8	1,084	3	3.9	3
Delaware.....	407.9	1.2	878	6	4.0	2
District of Columbia....	661.7	1.1	1,277	1	4.2	1
Florida.....	7,731.0	3.5	679	26	3.5	7
Georgia.....	3,877.0	1.5	742	19	1.9	30
Hawaii.....	597.6	3.1	669	28	2.0	26
Idaho.....	594.2	4.2	561	47	1.6	36
Illinois.....	5,644.9	0.5	848	8	2.9	10
Indiana.....	2,838.7	1.1	667	30	0.9	47
Iowa.....	1,419.5	1.9	616	37	1.7	33
Kansas.....	1,290.7	0.9	631	34	1.4	41
Kentucky.....	1,741.2	1.8	628	35	0.6	51
Louisiana.....	1,873.8	0.6	619	36	2.8	11
Maine.....	573.2	-0.5	614	38	1.7	33
Maryland.....	2,458.0	1.1	831	9	2.0	26
Massachusetts.....	3,094.8	0.1	964	4	1.2	44
Michigan.....	4,218.3	-0.4	780	13	1.2	44
Minnesota.....	2,559.7	1.3	783	12	0.8	49
Mississippi.....	1,113.1	1.3	545	49	2.3	22
Missouri.....	2,644.2	1.8	671	27	0.9	47
Montana.....	403.8	3.2	533	51	3.5	7
Nebraska.....	879.8	1.5	600	42	0.8	49
Nevada.....	1,187.6	6.7	714	21	2.6	16
New Hampshire.....	606.9	0.8	745	17	2.8	11
New Jersey.....	3,863.5	0.8	963	5	1.8	32
New Mexico.....	765.0	2.2	596	43	2.1	25
New York.....	8,242.3	0.8	1,096	2	3.7	6
North Carolina.....	3,808.0	2.3	687	24	2.7	14
North Dakota.....	320.4	2.6	550	48	1.5	37
Ohio.....	5,228.6	0.4	706	22	2.0	26
Oklahoma.....	1,453.9	2.5	591	44	1.9	30
Oregon.....	1,621.6	4.2	685	25	1.5	37
Pennsylvania.....	5,481.0	1.0	747	16	1.5	37
Rhode Island.....	466.9	0.5	736	20	1.2	44

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 2. Covered¹ employment and wages by state, first quarter 2005² (Continued)

Area	Employment		Average weekly wage ³			
	March 2005 (thousands)	Percent change, March 2004-05	Average weekly wage	National ranking by level	Percent change, first quarter 2004-05	National ranking by percent change
South Carolina.....	1,800.3	1.5	611	39	2.5	18
South Dakota.....	365.1	2.0	544	50	2.4	20
Tennessee.....	2,665.2	1.8	660	31	1.4	41
Texas.....	9,454.6	2.2	760	15	3.1	9
Utah.....	1,091.9	3.9	607	40	1.3	43
Vermont.....	297.5	0.9	639	33	3.9	3
Virginia.....	3,525.7	2.4	794	10	2.7	14
Washington.....	2,702.3	2.6	766	14	2.4	20
West Virginia.....	683.6	1.1	583	45	2.5	18
Wisconsin.....	2,687.0	1.4	668	29	1.7	33
Wyoming.....	246.2	3.0	606	41	3.9	3
Puerto Rico.....	1,048.2	1.4	433	(5)	3.3	(5)
Virgin Islands.....	44.2	2.1	650	(5)	13.4	(5)

¹ Includes workers covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) programs.

² Data are preliminary.

³ Average weekly wages were calculated using unrounded data.

⁴ Totals for the United States do not include data for Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.

⁵ Data not included in the national ranking.